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ABSTRACT

This paper asserts that the Holocaust of Nazi atrocities during World War II should be studied in high school English classes so that such events are not dismissed as historical fiction by future generations, and to help ensure that similar events do not occur. Toward this end, the paper suggests that a degree of objectivity be maintained in studying the Holocaust, indicating that such study should not concentrate exclusively on the Jewish victims, nor should "Nazi" be used as a synonym for "German." The paper highlights events during the Nazi domination of Europe with titles of historical documents, diaries, and other first-person accounts that might be used in the study of such events as extermination and concentration camp experiences, the destruction of the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto, the plight of anti-Nazi Germans, and experiences of the Nazi occupation of Poland, Rumania, Denmark, France, and Italy. (RL)

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RESOURCES FOR TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

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The story of the Holocaust is the story of upwards to twenty million murdered people--the destruction of sub-human and inferior people to make living room for a master race. Hitler was confident that there would be no great world outcry at such destruction, basing his opinion on the ease with which the Turks murdered one million Armenians in 1915 without raising the conscience of the world. And he might have been right about world opinion: we lose no sleep over murdered Cambodians or the countless Vietnamese who perish at sea because no Southeast Asian country, including Australia, will admit them. The story of the Holocaust is the story of exclusive nationalism and the doctrine of undesirable people. It is the continuing story of mankind.

CS 204 836

The Holocaust happened thirty to forty years ago. Many content that it should be forgotten, put out of mind; other, since the guilty have been punished, why keep bringing it to mind? But mankind has the ability to forget and ignore. The truth is forgotten and soon the guilty are honored as heroes. Some Germans have denied the existence of gas ovens at Ravensbrück, and Simon Wiesenthal found that German youth were being taught in school that the Anne Frank story never happened. History books, given time, will rehabilitate Hitler as they have Napoleon. History tends to make heroes out of villains.

There are several guidelines necessary for the study of the Holocaust, if a degree of objectivity is to be maintained.

1. The Holocaust should not be studied as an exclusive Nazi-Jewish event. People of many national origins were the object of Nazi extermination-- Jews, Slavs, Gypsies, and anyone who was considered a potential leader or political enemy.

2. Nazi should not be used as a synonym for German and then condemnation placed upon all Germans. Little known to the world is that fact that Hitler imprisoned three million aryan Germans and executed 500,000 of them. Many Nazi officials and SS officers were not German. The infamous Dr. Victor Caspesius, the pharmacist at Auschwitz who conducted many of the selections for the gas chambers, was not German but Rumanian.

The number of books available is unbelievable: personal memoirs, diaries, court depositions, scholarly studies, and fiction. There is a problem for the English teacher in that many books written during the war and in the early 1950's are out of print.

Since most people associate the Holocaust with the Nazi pogroms against the Jews, a good place to start a personal study would be with Raul Hilberg, Documents of Destruction, which gives the Nazi documents which proscribed and narrowed the rights of the Jews.

The Germans occupied Austria in 1938, so that the restrictions upon the Jews there set the pattern for what would occur elsewhere. James Heller, Our Share of Morning, fled Vienna with his wife and infant daughter, who was in a body cast, on one of the last trains out of Vienna to Paris. His story is one of almost continual flight as the Nazis increased their control over Occupied France and then Vichy France. Even after they crossed the Alps into Switzerland, carrying by then a five year old child in a body cast, they were

not out of the Nazi sphere of influence, because the Swiss border patrol took them back across the border into France. The Swiss were not as neutral as tradition has held.

Another Austrian was not so lucky. Viktor Frankel, Man's Search For Meaning, a psychiatrist, survived Auschwitz. His dispassionate account of his will to survive gives an excellent readable psychological analysis of what happened to prisoners. His theory of psychoanalysis, Logotherapy "the meaning of life", was based upon this extermination camp experience.

Hitler's next territorial grab was the Sudatenland of Czechoslovakia, populated by Germans, and the appeasing Neville Chamberlain agreed. Rudolf Vrba, I Cannot Forgive, written with Alan Bestic, as a seventeen year old Slovakian Jew tried to escape to Yugoslavia to join the partisans, but he was captured. He was the only survivor of Maidanek, only because he was transported to Auschwitz for extermination. In his two years in Auschwitz, where he worked in a job in which he could tally the number of people being killed, he correctly estimated the number at 2,750,000. He escaped Auschwitz to go to Hungary to warn the head of the Jewish Council, Dr. Kastener, that the 800,000 Hungarian Jews were Auschwitz bound. Kastener failed to act. Vrba accused Kastener of selling out to Eichmann to insure his own safety, and 400,000 Hungarian Jews were transported and killed. Accusation that Jewish leaders cooperated with the Nazis are found in many accounts. Vrba's book is well written and would be suitable for the high school student.

The Germans invaded Poland in September, 1939, with their blitzkrieg. Poland, still operating under a social class system in which the upper classes felt a sense of superiority, fell almost instantly. Jan Karski, Story of a Secret State, a young officer in the Polish horse artillery thought, "Germany was weak and Hitler was bluffing. When he [Hitler] saw that Poland was strong, united, and prepared, he would back down quickly and we shall all go

home. If not, the farcical little fanatic would be taught a severe lesson by Poland and, if necessary, by England and France." Karski did not even fire a shot; the German advance was so fast that Karski, in retreat, was captured by the Russians. His book is good for the Polish resistance. Karski, even ~~in~~war, never lost his upper class feeling of superiority and, as a result, he caused the death of many in the underground by his failure to appreciate and to heed the advice of lower class people.

Stanislaw Ordon, a Polish officer during the siege of Warsaw, kept a diary which was published in Scotland in 1942. When the Germans bombed the Jewish quarters and synagogue on the Day of Atonement, he called this action a Holocaust. Among his descriptions of German strafing, starvation, and destruction, his upper class viewpoint is exposed when he complained about the necessary slaughter of injured thoroughbred horses--as though he thought that Poland could be a world leader with its horse artillery. Other Polish books published in Britain during the war serve propaganda purposes: The German Invasion of Poland, a book of pictures, and Maria Brezeska, Through a Woman's Eyes, are good examples

Auschwitz was the main extermination center for Poles and Polish Jews. Some survived and wrote memoirs: Krystyna Zywulska, I Came Back, Krystyna Michalik, translator, Reminiscences of Former Auschwitz Prisoners, and Judith Sternberg Newman, In the Hell of Auschwitz.

The Polish prisoners in Auschwitz carried carried the political conflict between the communists and non-communists into the camp, with the communists gaining important prisoner positions, enabling them to survive the ordeal. Joseph Garlinski describes this conflict in Fighting Auschwitz, noting that Josef Cyrankiewicz, who survived the camp and joined the Stalinists, became the Prime Minister of Poland. He ordered the killing of Polish workers in the riots of 1956 and 1970. So holocaust activities were not confined to a short German-dominated period of history.

Many extermination centers were set up in Poland. Leon Wells, The Janowsk Road, tells the gruesome story of his survival at the Janowski camp in Eastern Poland.

The news of the destruction of the Warsaw Jewish Ghetto was smuggled out to the world by underground newspapers. S. Mendelsohn, in New York in 1944, pieced together this story in the Battle of the Warsaw Ghetto and John Hersey fictionalizes the story in The Wall.

A tragic note comes into the Polish accounts--bitter accusations that the Poles were as cruel to the Jews as the Germans. Joseph Tenenbaum, Underground: The Story of a People, traces this anti-Semitism of the Poles, Germans, and Russians. To counter the accusations, Wladyslaw Bartoszewski and Zofia Lewis, The Samaritans, and Bartoszewski, The Blood Shed Unites Us, give brief memoirs and accounts of Poles who risked their own lives to save Jews. Leon Wells, author of the Janowska Road, was hidden for a number of months by a Polish farmer.

After Hitler broke his pact with Stalin and invaded Russia, he instituted the destruction of Jews, gypsies, inferior Asiatics, etc. in Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, and Russia. This land was to be living room for the master race. To eliminate these people four Einsatzgruppen were formed with the leaders having autonomous powers. They did not use the gas chamber; they used fire, the machine gun, and the death ditch. Michael Musmanno, who was the U.S. judge at the trials of some of these Kommandos, wrote a very perceptive account of the Nazi leaders and their actions in The Eichmann Kommandos. Michale Elkins described one such Eisatzkommando action in Forged in Fury. Elie Wiesel's young hero in The Gates of the Forest escapes such an action and joins a partisan band.

The German Army rolled on, often preceded by pro-Nazi regimes as in Rumania. Ruth Klüger, a young Israeli, was sent to Rumania as the agent for ALIYAH Bet in 1939 to try to persuade Jews to flee, but she met with

extreme resistance among the leaders of the Jewish community who did not recognize the danger signs of the coming holocaust until it was too late. Her book, The Last Escape, is an indictment of British foreign policy which prohibited Jews from going to Israel, keeping them bottled up where they could be killed. Leon Uris develops the same theme and the theme of the birth of Israel in The Exodus.

In France the round up of the Jews for transportation was carried out by the use of the French police. Claude Lévy and Paul Tillard, Betrayal at Vel d'Hiv, recreate the human agony by piecing together the events from the recollections of survivors. Over seven thousand people were crowded into the Vel d'Hir sports arena for seven days during the summer, with no provisions made for food, water, and with only twenty toilets. The first step on the way to extermination is to break the person's sense of well being--to reduce him to the animal level. Of course the suicide rate was high, but corpses did not have to be transported.

Germaine Tillion, in Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women, traced one train load of women political prisoners from Paris. She compared her Ravensbrück experience to that of the prisoners of the French in Algeria in the 1950's.

Transportation of Italian Jews did not occur until the fall of 1943, after the Italians had surrendered to the Allies. Two books are important here: Robert Katz, Black Sabbath, and Primo Lévi, If This is a Man. Lévi was in the Jewish resistance, but was betrayed to the Germans. His account, very well written, is rather a combination of the descriptive horror of the normal memoir and the psychological analysis of survival of Frankl. Katz studied the deportation of 1041 Roman Jews in a very detailed scholarly manner to test Hannah Arendt's theory that part of the guilt for destroying the Jews should be placed upon the Jewish

leaders who cooperated with the Nazis. His conclusion supported this hypothesis. The Jewish leaders, President Foa and Almanzi--a former Fascist judge and a police official in Rome under Mussolini, were more interested in preserving their place in society and in saving the institutions of the Jews, rather than saving individual Jews. On the other hand, Katz found that the Gestapo chief Keppler, the Vatican attache' Von Kessel, Foreign affairs Mühlhausen and Field Marshall Kesselring tried to thwart Himmler's orders to transport the Jews.

Charles Stackel, Destruction and Survival, shows how the destruction of Jews in Croatia was carried out by two men who had Jewish wives.

In Holland, there is the familar Diary of Ann Frank and more recently Corrie Ten Boom, The Hiding Place, her story of her family's attempt to hige Dutch Jews and her concentration camp experience. Henriette Roosenburg, The Walls Came Tumbling Down, gives the last weeks of the concentration camp experience and the weeks of travel through Russian occupied territory, trying to get back to Holland.

Denmark was occup ied by the Germans, but little fighting took place there. Leni Yahil, The Rescue of Danish Jewry, shows how the Danes smuggled most of the Jews to Sweden. Flemming Maus, The Spark and the Flame, describes his leadership in the Danish underground resistance.

The three million jailed Germans, 500,000 killed, represent an indigenous holocaust for political reasons. Some of the books by Diedrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Niemöller are relevant because they opposed Naziism at the religious level. Eric Boehm, We Survived, gives the stories of some Germans who survived the concentration camps. Helmut Gollwitzer, who spent five years in Russian concentration camps, does the same in Dying We Live, except he tells the stories of those who chose death rather than to cooperate with the Nazis.

In addition to the literature on concentration camps, there is

the prisoner of war camp and escape literature. Peter Makucewicz, I Escaped from Germany, and S. Leszczyc, Prisoner of War No. 619/45, both Polish, and Jean Hélon, They Shall Not Have Me, French, have written their prisoner of war and escape stories in a realistic way. All three books would appeal to adolescent boys. However, P. R. Reid, The Colditz Story, British, is written in a condescending manner from an upper-class officer point of view.

The question of guilt has been a theme noted earlier. Reading trial transcripts gives an excellent insight into the amoral character of most of the guilty. Rolf Hochhuth, The Deputy, published in 1964 and staged in several large cities that year, raised considerable controversy by calling Pius XII guilty for not making a public statement of condemnation of the Nazis for killing Jews.

Simon Wiesenthal's memoirs, The Merders Among Us, is concerned with bringing the guilty to judgment. And his short book, The Sunflower, deals with the problem of forgiveness. As an inmate in a concentration camp, he was taken on a work detail to a German hospital where a nurse takes him to the room of a dying German officer who had participated in the Einsatz killings and who wanted a Jew to forgive him before he died. Wiesenthal could not forgive, but the question "Did he do right?" was with him for years.

I have only mentioned one novel by Elie Wiesel. There are others. The House of Dolls by Ka-Tzetnik 135633 gives the camp life of young girls used as camp prostitutes.

I'm afraid that this survey just barely touches the literature of the Holocaust.